



Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

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State and Federal Wildlife Officials Work With Local Partners to Restore Shad in Charles River

Agencies releasing three million shad larvae into the Charles River this summer

WALTHAM – Wednesday, July 17, 2013 – Officials from the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game's (DFG) Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) released tens of thousands of American shad larvae into the Charles River in Waltham today as part of a multi-year effort to restore native shad populations in Massachusetts rivers.

Once abundant in larger river systems, such as the Charles, Connecticut, Merrimack and Neponset rivers, American shad populations have decreased over the last century in Massachusetts waterways due to construction of dams, water pollution and overfishing. Water quality improvements, construction of fish passage facilities and regulation of fishing have resulted in the recent restoration of shad in the Connecticut and Merrimack River systems.

"We are optimistic for the future of the American shad restoration effort as we see the return of adult fish into the Charles River," said DFG Commissioner Mary Griffin. "We are grateful for the support of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Charles River Watershed Association, and pleased with the impressive returns of river herring in the Charles River as well."

The goal of the American Shad Propagation Project in the Charles River is to restore viable populations of American shad to the river and create a local sport fishery. The project is a long-term collaborative effort between the DMF and the USFWS Eastern New England Fishery Complex. It includes the development of a shad larvae stocking program in conjunction with fish passage improvements.

"We are pleased to work with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the Charles River Watershed Association and others to enhance American shad populations and improve habitat for other migratory fish," said Wendi Weber, USFWS Northeast Regional Director. "This partnership is resulting in encouraging returns of hatchery-reared fish to the Charles River, as well as providing improvements in fisheries science and technology that can be used in other watersheds."

The larvae stocking program is modeled after successful programs implemented for restoring shad to Chesapeake Bay tributaries. In the Massachusetts program, adult shad migrating upriver to spawn are obtained from the Merrimack River, where the shad population has rebounded over the past several decades.

"I think history will show that these organizations and people made significant contributions to the restoration of the environment in these first years of the 21st Century," said Charles River Watershed Association (CRWA) Executive Director Bob Zimmerman. "We're making significant strides on the Charles and the release of this iconic fish is a great case in point."

The Charles River is the primary target for shad restoration in Massachusetts due to the availability of spawning and rearing habitat, functioning fishways and historical significance of shad in the system. The partners hope to restore an adult population of about 30,000 in the Charles River.

Since 2010, DMF biologists have been monitoring the Watertown Dam fishway for adult shad returning to the Charles River and in 2013 have been using a video system that records all fish passing out the exit of the fishway. The CRWA has assisted USFWS and DMF in the American shad restoration efforts by monitoring the Charles River prior to release events to help project fish survival rates, and following release events to document habitat conditions. CRWA has also worked to repair and maintain fish passage along the Charles, especially fish ladders at dams so that adult shad can return to the river to spawn.

DFG is responsible for promoting the conservation and enjoyment of the Commonwealth's natural resources. DFG carries out this mission through land protection and wildlife habitat management, management of inland and marine fish and wildlife species and ecological restoration of fresh water, salt water and terrestrial habitats. DFG promotes enjoyment of the Massachusetts environment through outdoor skills workshops, fishing festivals and other educational programs, and by enhancing access to the Commonwealth's rivers, lakes and coastal waters.

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